

# **Housing Choice Vouchers (AKA Section 8)**

## **Fact Sheet\***

### **What are housing choice vouchers?**

The housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects.

Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs). The PHAs receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program.

A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by the PHA.

A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the PHA on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program. Under certain circumstances, if authorized by the PHA, a family may use its voucher to purchase a modest home.

### **Am I eligible?**

Eligibility for a housing voucher is determined by the PHA based on the total annual gross income and family size and is limited to US citizens and specified categories of non-citizens who have eligible immigration status. In general, the family's income may not exceed 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the family chooses to live. By law, a PHA must provide 75 percent of its voucher to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30 percent of the area median income. Median income levels are published by HUD and vary by location. The PHA serving your community can provide you with the income limits for your area and family size.

During the application process, the PHA will collect information on family income, assets, and family composition. The PHA will verify this information with other local agencies, your employer and bank, and will use the information to determine program eligibility and the amount of the housing assistance payment.

If the PHA determines that your family is eligible, the PHA will put your name on a waiting list, unless it is able to assist you immediately. Once your name is reached on the waiting list, the PHA will contact you and issue to you a housing voucher.

### **Local preferences and waiting list - what are they and how do they affect me?**

Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, a PHA may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future.

PHAs may establish local preferences for selecting applicants from its waiting list. For example, PHAs may give a preference to a family who is (1) homeless or living in substandard housing, (2) paying more than

50% of its income for rent, or (3) involuntarily displaced. Families who qualify for any such local preferences move ahead of other families on the list who do not qualify for any preference. Each PHA has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community.

### **Housing vouchers - how do they function?**

The housing choice voucher program places the choice of housing in the hands of the individual family. A very low-income family is selected by the PHA to participate is encouraged to consider several housing choices to secure the best housing for the family needs. A housing voucher holder is advised of the unit size for which it is eligible based on family size and composition.

The housing unit selected by the family must meet an acceptable level of health and safety before the PHA can approve the unit. When the voucher holder finds a unit that it wishes to occupy and reaches an agreement with the landlord over the lease terms, the PHA must inspect the dwelling and determine that the rent requested is reasonable.

The PHA determines a payment standard that is the amount generally needed to rent a moderately-priced dwelling unit in the local housing market and that is used to calculate the amount of housing assistance a family will receive. However the payment standard does not limit and does not affect the amount of rent a landlord may charge or the family may pay. A family which receives a housing voucher can select a unit with a rent that is below or above the payment standard. The housing voucher family must pay 30% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, and if the unit rent is greater than the payment standard the family is required to pay the additional amount. By law, whenever a family moves to a new unit where the rent exceeds the payment standard, the family may not pay more than 40 percent of its adjusted monthly income for rent.

### **The rent subsidy**

The PHA calculates the maximum amount of housing assistance allowable. The maximum housing assistance is generally the lesser of the payment standard minus 30% of the family's monthly adjusted income or the gross rent for the unit minus 30% of monthly adjusted income

### **Can I move and continue to receive housing choice voucher assistance?**

A family's housing needs change over time with changes in family size, job locations, and for other reasons. The housing choice voucher program is designed to allow families to move without the loss of housing assistance. Moves are permissible as long as the family notifies the PHA ahead of time, terminates its existing lease within the lease provisions, and finds acceptable alternate housing.

Under the voucher program, new voucher-holders may choose a unit anywhere in the United States if the family lived in the jurisdiction of the PHA issuing the voucher when the family applied for assistance. Those new voucher-holders not living in the jurisdiction of the PHA at the time the family applied for housing assistance must initially lease a unit within that jurisdiction for the first twelve months of assistance. A family that wishes to move to another PHA's jurisdiction must consult with the PHA that currently administers its housing assistance to verify the procedures for moving.

### **Roles - the tenant, the landlord, the housing agency and HUD**

Once a PHA approves an eligible family's housing unit, the family and the landlord sign a lease and, at the same time, the landlord and the PHA sign a housing assistance payments contract that runs for the same term as the lease. This means that everyone -- tenant, landlord and PHA -- has obligations and responsibilities under the voucher program.

**Tenant's Obligations:** When a family selects a housing unit, and the PHA approves the unit and lease, the family signs a lease with the landlord for at least one year. The tenant may be required to pay a security deposit to the landlord. After the first year the landlord may initiate a new lease or allow the family to remain in the unit on a month-to-month lease.

When the family is settled in a new home, the family is expected to comply with the lease and the program requirements, pay its share of rent on time, maintain the unit in good condition and notify the PHA of any changes in income or family composition.

**Landlord's Obligations:** The role of the landlord in the voucher program is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The dwelling unit must pass the program's housing quality standards and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments. In addition, the landlord is expected to provide the services agreed to as part of the lease signed with the tenant and the contract signed with the PHA.

**Housing Authority's Obligations:** The PHA administers the voucher program locally. The PHA provides a family with the housing assistance that enables the family to seek out suitable housing and the PHA enters into a contract with the landlord to provide housing assistance payments on behalf of the family. If the landlord fails to meet the owner's obligations under the lease, the PHA has the right to terminate assistance payments. The PHA must reexamine the family's income and composition at least annually and must inspect each unit at least annually to ensure that it meets minimum housing quality standards.

**HUD's Role:** To cover the cost of the program, HUD provides funds to allow PHAs to make housing assistance payments on behalf of the families. HUD also pays the PHA a fee for the costs of administering the program. When additional funds become available to assist new families, HUD invites PHAs to submit applications for funds for additional housing vouchers. Applications are then reviewed and funds awarded to the selected PHAs on a competitive basis. HUD monitors PHA administration of the program to ensure program rules are properly followed.

#### **Additional Information and other subsidy programs**

For additional information about the voucher program, contact either the [local PHA](#) serving your community or the Office of Public Housing within your [local HUD office](#). There may be a long wait for assistance under the housing voucher program. If the PHA also administers the public housing program, applicants for the housing choice voucher program may also ask to be placed on the waiting list for the public housing program. HUD also administers other subsidized programs and you may obtain a list of programs in your area from the Office of Housing at your local HUD office.

\*Excerpts from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's web site located at: [www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/about/fact\\_sheet.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/about/fact_sheet.cfm)

<b>Public Housing Authorities in Maine (aka Section 8 Agents): Tenant &amp;/or Project Based Rental Assistance</b>	
<b>Auburn Housing Authority</b> 20 Great Falls Plaza, PO Box 3037 Auburn, Maine 04212-3037 Tel: 784-7351 TTY: 784-5545	<b>Augusta Housing Authority</b> 33 Union St. Suite 3 Augusta, Maine 04330 Tel: 626-2357 TTY: 626-2357
<b>Bangor Housing Authority</b> 161 Davis Road Bangor, Maine 04401-2399 Tel: 942-6365 TTY: 711	<b>Bath Housing Authority</b> 80 Congress Avenue Bath, Maine 04530 Tel: 443-3116 TTY: 711
<b>Biddeford Housing Authority</b> 22 South Street, PO Box 2287 Biddeford, Maine 04005 Tel: 282-6537 TTY: 711	<b>Brewer Housing Authority</b> Fifteen Colonial Circle, Suite Brewer, Maine 04412 Tel: 989-7890 TTY: 989-9810
<b>Brunswick Housing Authority</b> 12 Stone Street, PO Box A Brunswick, Maine 04011 Tel: 725-8711 TTY: 711	<b>Caribou Housing Authority</b> 25 High Street Caribou, Maine 04736 Tel: 493-4234 TTY: 711
<b>Fort Fairfield Housing Authority</b> 255 Maine Street, PO Box 230 Fort Fairfield, Maine 04742 Tel: 476-5771 TTY: 711	<b>Indian Township Passamaquoddy Reservation Housing Authority</b> 10 Raven Drive, PO Box 99 Princeton, Maine 04668 Tel: 796-8004 TTY: 711
<b>Lewiston Housing Authority</b> One College Street Lewiston, Maine 04240 Tel: 783-1423 TTY: 783-0865	<b>Mt. Desert Island/Ellsworth Housing Authority</b> 80 Mt. Desert Street, PO Box 28 Bar Harbor, Maine 04609 Tel: 288-4770 TTY: 288-2169
<b>Old Town Housing Authority</b> 358 Main St., PO Box 404 Old Town, Maine 04468 Tel: 827-6151 TTY: 827-6151	<b>Pleasant Point Passamaquoddy Reservation Housing Authority</b> 15 Elders Way Pleasant Point, RR 1 PO Box 339 Perry, Maine 04667 Tel: 853-6021 TTY: 711
<b>Portland Housing Authority</b> 14 Baxter Boulevard Portland, Maine 04101-1822 Tel: 773-4753 TTY: 774-2570	<b>Presque Isle Housing Authority</b> 58 Birch Street Presque Isle, Maine 04769 Tel: 768-8231 TTY: 764-5161
<b>Sanford Housing Authority</b> 114 Emery Street, PO Box 1008 Sanford, Maine 04073 Tel: 324-6747 TTY: 324-1253	<b>South Portland Housing Authority</b> 51 Landry Circle South Portland, Maine 04106 Tel: 773-4140 TTY: 711
<b>Topsham Housing Authority</b> 95-A Lisbon Street, PO Box 100 Lewiston, Maine 04243-00100 Tel: 786-5667 TTY: 711	<b>Van Buren Housing Authority</b> 130 Champlain Street Van Buren, Maine 04785 Tel: 868-5441 TTY: 868-2833
<b>Waterville Housing Authority</b> 88 Silver Street Waterville, Maine 04901 Tel: 873-2155 TTY: 711	<b>Westbrook Housing Authority</b> 30 Liza Harmon Drive Westbrook, Maine 04092 Tel: 854-9779 TTY: 711

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